

## EDITORS' NOTE

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“The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space.”

— Michel Foucault

“Of Other Spaces,” 1967

Challenges in reconfiguring any form of existence find spatial dynamics at the fulcrum of their transformative vision. To think of our times in their irreducible complexity, therefore, is to think anew of space—a respacing of our existence in the world. Space, being the condition of possibility, prompts new significations that usher towards different ways of knowing and being. The concept of *espacement* by Derrida highlights the fundamental dimension of space where the very conception of formations—of say, subjectivity, epistemology, politics, ethics, intelligibility, and identity among others—is spatial, permitting the relations and structures *to be*. The network of these formations, as the formative spatial dimension determining our actions, transfigures the heterogenous folds of the space of present. Amidst the current global crisis of COVID-19 in particular, the dynamics of these formations have become even more forceful appropriating both change and stability simultaneously.

In contrast to historiographies positing human as the only agent of change, epidemiological history foregrounds the agency of pathogens as drivers of historical change (McNeill 23).<sup>1</sup> The global scale of COVID-19 too has brought tectonic shifts in our understanding of diseases and their impact on humans. The stable relational spatiality of traditional social forms, generative ground for thriving of the virus, is ruptured and our existing modes of interconnected living have seen unprecedented changes. Managing intersubjective space through social distancing—the regulation of space—turns out to be the only immunity available before the development of vaccine. People remain house-bound in the hopes of stopping the contagion, resulting in the transformation of shared spaces—markets, schools, factories, recreational sites, and roads—into barren and eerie ones. Feeling caged and incapacitated under imposed lockdowns, the contours of mental space too have crumbled with their humanitarian instincts numbed in favour of self-preservation. With the growing anxiety and precariousness in such alien circumstances, a pressing dialogue emerges about survival in a world whose evermore criss-crossed character facilitated by modern technology and transport ironically becomes a catalyst to precipitate pointless deaths. The unabated waves of lockdown to counter it have given currency to new questions pertaining to the respacing of existence—ways of cohabitation and interaction. The viral nature of the disease provokes reinterpreted configurations of

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<sup>1</sup>William H. McNeill’s seminal work *Plagues and Peoples* is noteworthy in its account of how the exchange and contraction of virus and bacteria brought unprecedented changes in structures of society in different periods of world history. Whether it be Antonine plague in 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Black Death in 14<sup>th</sup> century, diseases like syphilis and smallpox during transatlantic exchange in post-1492 or cholera in 19<sup>th</sup> century, role of infectious diseases has been pivotal in shaping human history.

old spaces and agencies to ensure sustainable models of inclusivity, recreation, along with protection. As the world gears towards this *new normal*, the romantically naïve impulse to ‘return to the normal’ at its earliest—social gatherings of different kinds like marriage receptions, sports tournaments, social or political gatherings, etc.—is a sign of misreading the present human situation.

The formation of space, brought to fore in the context of living, has modified our understanding of the reality of death as its foil. The miasmic sweep of the pandemic, with mass burials and cremations, conveys a sense of inescapable doom. Due to the fear of contagion, performing of last rites has seen compromises in making cultural-specific forms of giving honour to the dead. The pain of the survivors, already incomprehensibly flustered in thought, can’t find shelter in the communal spaces of bereavement that traditionally offered comfort as spaces of solidarity. The generations surviving the pandemic are bound to have an altered sense of cohabited space: measured proximity being the norm of new forms of living. While we are still struggling for a stable society to emerge, looking at ways of death in the pandemic may perhaps shape the ways of living and thereby that of culture, for “Culture itself, culture in general” Derrida contends, “is essentially, before anything, even a priori, the culture of death. Consequently, then, it is a history of death” (43).

The effects of pandemic are not limited to biological side of life, rather are adopted as essential factors in calculating the useful and the disposable within the political matrix. As evident, along with the spaces prompting infection and disease, there are other forms of fear and violence imbricated in the pandemic owing to the State’s systemic strategies of erasure and denial. With the politicization of space, efforts to create a globally shared dialogue get uncovered as nothing but niceties hiding ugly rationales behind the national and international policies. Using the norms of social distancing and self-isolation, the enforcing power of the dominant State has utilized space to silence bodies of dissents and protests. The rhetoric of war against the pandemic employed by the State allows, contends Alex de Waal, the State to justify its extreme measures and suppression of dissent. Facing the danger of what Agamben calls normalization of the state of exception (Peters 1), the individual citizen too is displaced from the discourse that weighs against him in favour of statistical solutions. The State refuses to let its citizens either leave or enter its boundaries, unabashedly claiming to espouse the principle of greater good, even as common man remains suspended between spaces to succumb to either the virus or to the policies put in place to save them from the said virus. State’s interventionist policies also politicize the debates within medical community—seen in the conflicts between virologists and epidemiologists on what are, supposedly, purely scientific questions—and conversely, politics is medicalized where State treats its “citizen as a patient in need of perpetual care and turning social deviance into an epidemic disruption to be treated or suppressed” (Esposito).

The digital space too, in many ways, has spawned dis/misinformation that is impossible to sift through, hazarded psychological health of people through their overdependence on technology, and in general has helped contribute to the fear of

psychosis gripping the precarious populations restricted in isolated spaces. An array of socio-economic and political questions also emerged out of this over-reliance on digital platforms, pertaining to the accessibility and equity as “those without internet access [found] themselves locked out from an increasing number of social spaces” (Archer and Wildman 32). Conversely, it has also helped us retain a semblance of civilizational poise by facilitating continuation of socio-economic structures in the form of work-from-home culture, formation of work-stations, and circulation of necessary commodities as well as healthcare and educational services, thereby saving lives and economies from complete collapse. It allows us to recast the role of virtual space as a nodal pivot providing quantifiable data on trauma, rate of infection and survival, domain of altruistic benefits through constant flow of information, as well as a recreational space permitting us to cope with the calamitous tragedy unfolding outside in physical space.

Diverse disciplines have distended their contours to design formative spaces of thinking through this liminality. The incipient changes brought by the virus are manifest, not only in our health care system, but across politics, urban planning, economics, architecture, ethics, proxemics, and psychology among others. In this emerging new configuration, the realm of our experience—domestic sphere, social environment, and body as breathing spaces—mobilizes a complex dynamic of spatiality where, to put in Deleuzian terms, the subject/self is enfolded with the *other* and the *outside*. It remains to be seen, however, how the differential quotient of the contemporary historical moment gets unfolded in times to come. Yet, the attempt to reimagine space in the context of such new folds of time vitally bears on new modalities of becoming; and new kinds of subjectivities are already undergoing formation in the ongoing crisis.

The last Issue of this Volume that broadly concentrated upon aspects of reality which resist subsumption in the rational frameworks of understanding—dystopia, aporia, and fantasy—explores the agency of space in constituting experiences and processes through which we navigate the incomprehensible dynamics of the current pandemic. Engaging with the theme of “Rethinking Space Beyond the Pandemic,” the two papers published in this Issue deal with the possible reconfigurations of space by reimagining the future via heterotopic spaces. What they have in common is a trenchant critique of colonial history and its far-reaching politics in shaping subjectivities and societies. While Damilare Bello’s paper plays out the African experience of the crisis of Western modernity, William Puckett diagnoses the legacies of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its ramifications for African-American diasporic experience. Both papers bring out a way forward to conceive alternate futures beyond the hegemonic Western narratives, thereby contending that reimaginings of future are not delinked with the repurposing of history. In the wake of Covid-19, reclaiming diverse forms of indigenous knowledge systems too is a point to reckon with in the accentuated discourse on Western modernity. Incorporating this thread to build upon apocalypse-dystopia as radical sense-making paradigm, Bello’s paper teases out implications of utopian-thinking in the conceptualization of new future for Africa. In doing so, it explores the liberating potentials of Africanfuturism and Afrotopia as literary-political interventions premised

upon epistemic disobedience—the operational dynamics of this project being examined through a reading of Chinelo Onwualu’s story “Read Before Use.” Puckett’s paper, situated in the space of minor literature, engages with the colonial and postcolonial hierarchies present in Octavia E. Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy with a view to problematize questions of originary voice and hybridization within colonial history. Through the exploration of the place and space of minor literature that subverts the colonizer’s language, this paper gravitates towards the construction of fluid diasporic posthuman subjectivities.

As we conclude our Volume 4, we thank all our contributors for their responsiveness and active partaking in the publication process. In bringing this work together, we all have braved against the ongoing turbulent times, and hope that through our efforts *LLIDS* encourages networks of solidarity among our readers.

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